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ABSTRACT

This presentation reviews and discusses literature on the following problems affecting blacks in America today: (1) housing; (2) education; (3) economics; (4) civil rights; (5) drugs; and (6) Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). An attempt is made to focus on race relations as a major factor in the majority of the problems discussed. In order to lay the groundwork for a discussion of the problems, the paper begins with an historical overview of the black American experience, discusses the development of black neighborhoods, and points out the role of social stratification among blacks. Among the activities recommended for improving the situation of black Americans are affirmative action, full employment, and social welfare reform. A list of references is included. (PS)

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Problems of Blacks in Urban Ghettos

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Problems Of Blacks In Urban Ghettos

This presentation is a review of the literature on some of the problems of Blacks in urban ghettos and in Black America generally. An attempt will also be made to focus on race relations as a major factor for the majority of the problems discussed. The paper is divided into four areas (a) Historical overview, (b) Growth and development, (c) Social class stratification and (d) Present and future problems. A summary and recommendation are also included.

Historical Overview

According to Lewis (1955) the concept of "ghetto" originated among the Jews in Europe. He wrote that America has contributed to the concept of ghetto to the restriction of persons to a special area and limiting of their freedom of choice on the basis of skin color. He further stated that the residential segregation of Black people is virtually complete and that there is some evidence that, rather than deminishing, it is increasing. Therefore, one can readily see that the major trend which accounted for this increase among the Black population has been a rise in urbanization. This rise occurred with the migration of Blacks from rural areas of the south to urban areas of the north and northwest.

Lewis later wrote that during the second decade of the twentieth century, the United States entered World War I, which caused an acceleration in northward migration, due to restrictive immigration laws against Europeans in the 1920s. The Blacks northward movement continued subsiding during the Depression of the 1930s but accelerated again when the United States entered World War II. This regional redistribution and urbanization continued, with more than three million Black people moving from the south to the north in the period

from 1940–1960.

Growth And Development

Pinkney (1975) wrote that until the second half of the twentieth century Blacks were predominantly rural people concentrated in the south. Although interregional and intraregional redistribution of Blacks had persisted since the turn of the century, so heavy was the concentration of Blacks in the rural south that only in recent years have they become heavily urbanized and reasonably evenly distributed between the south and non-south regions of the country. He later pointed out that at the present time, the proportions of Blacks living in urban areas exceeds that of the population as a whole living in urban areas.

Taeuber and Taeuber (1965) wrote with regard to this urbanization developmental distribution that Blacks have been forced to live with other Blacks whether urban or rural people. Freedom of choice in residence has always been and will continue to be an issue about which white Americans maintain strong negative views. White Americans live in communities based on education, income, occupations and other criteria of status, but Blacks what ever their status, have been always mainly forced to live with other Blacks. Voluntary associations among Black people tend to be limited to those of similar status, but the general residential pattern has been one in which Black people of all status levels must live side by side, in sections–the section of the city to which they have been relegated. Therefore, residential segregation is as characteristically American as any other aspect of the culture, no matter what the city. The rule is that the Black section of town is a distinctive one.

Osofsky (1965) reported similar developments for all Black neighborhoods. He stated that as a result of racial discrimination one outgrowth of discrimination is "racial succession," that is, Black Americans taking over homes formerly occupied by whites.

Social Class Stratification

This section will focus on the existence of class distinction as a problem which holds for Blacks throughout the United States. More specifically, Upper Class Blacks, Middle Class Blacks, Lower Class Blacks, and the Under Class Blacks will be the focus of discussion.

Upper Class Blacks

In a definition given by Frazier (1957) the Upper Class Blacks are defined as those who have the most money, those with the greatest amount of education, those with the best family backgrounds, and those who wield the greatest political power. He also indicated that the Upper Class Blacks tend to associate with Upper Class Blacks. Their entertaining, according to Frazier, takes place in the home, except public events which they sponsor. They are active in religious and social clubs, especially fraternities and sororities, and support civil rights activities through the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) or the Urban League.

Middle Class

According to Clark (1965) the Middle Class Blacks in Chicago are not necessarily limited to those persons of appropriate income and occupations. Rather, the middle class is marked off from the lower class by patterns of behavior expressed in stable family and associational relationships, in great concern with "Front" and respectability and a drive to get ahead. The Blacks maintained the proper associational relationships necessary for advancing themselves. Like the Upper Class Blacks, the Middle Class expends considerable time and energy in social clubs and other social organizations, especially fraternities and sororities.

Because of the "risky" status of the Middle Class Blacks, their overriding concern is with maintaining respectability. This concern has frequently led to self-hate characterized,

by contempt for Lower Class Blacks. Clark later took a rather harsh view of the Middle Class Black and the fantasy world they shared with the Upper Class Blacks. He wrote:

> The emphasis upon "social" life or society is one of the main props of the world of make believe into which Black bourgeoisie has sought to escape from its inferiority and frustration in American society. This world of make believe, to be sure, is a reflection of the values of American society, but it lacks the economic basis that would give its roots in the world of reality. In escaping into a world of make believe, Middle Class Negroes have rejected both identification with the Negro and his traditional culture. Through delusions of wealth and power they have identified with white America which continues to reject them. But these delusions leave them frustrated because they are unable to escape from the emptiness and futility of their existence.

Lower Class Blacks

In a study done by the U.S. Department of Labor (1965) it was indicated that two-thirds of the urban Black population constituted the bottom class in class structure in the Black community. It is of the Lower Class Black that so many stereotypes have developed. These are the Blacks who are chronically unemployed, who work at the lowest-paid jobs and are still defined as "lazy" and who make up a high proportion of the welfare rolls in urban areas. The Lower Class Black is most often a recent migrant from another area seeking to improve his status in the city. It is also the Lower Class Blacks, to whom widespread social problems are attributed. Finally, it is the Lower Class Black who in many ways was the major target of the war on poverty. For, historically, these are the individuals who have received fewer social rewards than any other group. They are crowded into the slums of the largest cities and are only noticed when acts of violence (real or imagined) are attributed to

them.

Under Class Concept

In understanding the Under Class Concept, Glasgow (1980) suggested that in order for one to understand the Under Class Concept, the first point to make is that it derives from social stratification theory, the arrangement of statuses in a society the performance of social roles attendant to those statuses, and the differential rewards and privileges that accompany them. The American stratification system is generally described in terms of different social classes, the traditional categories being "Upper Class," "Middle Class" and "Lower Class." He further stated that the Under Class came to prominence with the migration of members of the Middle Class out of the urban black communities. This exodus was facilitated by the success of the Civil Rights Movement against housing discrimination. A critical consequence of this development left members of the lower class without the positive values, institutions, role models, and social controls that their middle class brethren had formerly provided. By these developments taking place, the Black Under Class consists of the worst-positioned persons among the Black poor. The Black Under Class, by prevailing societal criteria, is not and has relatively little prospect of becoming self-supporting or socially mobile, with the current size of this Under Class ranging from an estimate of five to seven million persons.

Present And Future Problems (Of Urban America)

This section will list and discuss several salient points relative to some present and future conditions of urban America.

Housing

In examining the changes and differences in housing quality for Blacks and whites, Amin and Mariam (1987) pointed out that over the past two decades, there has been a concerted effort aimed at providing adequate housing to all Americans regardless of race. The extent to which this effort has met success is open to debate. They further stated that segregation and other historically restrictive practices in access to housing have adversely affected residential opportunities for Blacks. There is ample evidence to show that Blacks continue to be segregated in urban areas where quality housing is in short supply. Substantial evidence also exists showing Black–occupied housing units rarely reverting to white occupancy; which perpetuates the pattern of housing segregation. Thompson (1987) in his article "Blacks: Endangered Species" (*Final Call Newspaper*, April 22, 1987) wrote that what happened to the American Indians yesterday is happening to the Blacks today. Black Americans today are victims of a grand Black removal, white resettlement and the destruction of every level of Black institutional life. He further stated that Black Americans are being systematically phased out of the centers of American's major cities or coerced to relocate to the decaying outer neighborhoods and suburbs of the returning whites who fled 30 years ago. And what is the Black community's response to these new 21st century challenges? None.

Education

The results of a study by Robinson (1987) "A Nation at Risk," indicated that America is virtually ignoring the nation's "at risk" Black children. This study showed related organizations such as the Urban League, Childrens Defense Fund and National Alliance of Black School Educators spoke to the point of the plight of "at risk" children, those who are poor, non white, handicapped or female. He further stated that in the rush by politicians and educators to reform American schooling, the problem of Black students continue to expand in alarming and threatening proportions. He further described some of the problems

of Black students as: Black girls having babies; young Black men dropping out of school; work ethics; developing false notions of manhood; becoming involved in drugs; and resorting to careers in crime. Also linked to the problems of Black students are those of Black teachers. Because of the increased opportunities in other professions, low teacher compensation, status and prestige, and low passing rates of Blacks on teacher pre-service and in-service examinations, the most important role model for Blacks in the education enterprise may be virtually eliminated. In 1980 Black teachers represented 8.6 percent of all teachers, K—12. But if competency testing continues along with retirement and teacher burn out, the Black teaching force could be reduced to less than 5 percent by 1990.

Economics

According to Swinton (1986) in describing the status of the Black community throughout the Reagan era, the economic status of the Black community has continued to decline, despite modest improvements in the economic conditions of Black Americans during 1985 and 1986. The report indicated that the four year-old recovery has had such weak impact on Blacks that their current labor market conditions are still more depressed than they were at the bottom of all previous post war recessions. It was also explained that most standard indicators of economic life continue to record the highest levels of racial inequality since the mid 1960s. The national data on income, poverty rates, and labor market status showed the extent of economic distress in the Black community. Moreover, since the advent of the Reagan administration, racial inequality in income, employment, and wages has increased. On the national level, six years of Reagan policies have produted no gains for Blacks. He further described the low income levels of the Black population that were reflected in high Black poverty, which indicated during 1985 that nearly one of every three Blacks (31.3) had incomes which placed them below the poverty level.

Civil Rights

With regard to the law and civil rights for Black Americans, Chambers (1987) pointed out that few would have thought that more than thirty years after *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) and twenty years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Black Americans and their supporters would today be commiting most of their resources in an effort simply to preserve past gains, which has been the necessary focus of activity by most civil rights groups since the Reagan administration took office and that remained true during 1986. He also reported, in the discussion, on attempts of the Reagan administration to carry on an agenda of undermining effective enforcement of civil rights laws. In general, Chambers felt that the courts, including the Supreme Court, have rejected the most important arguments of the administration and have continued to interpret broadly the civil rights statues. With a new senate, the administration's efforts to fill the judiciary with rigidly ideological judges, as well as to press for legislation that will limit opportunities for minorities, should be more difficult.

From the above discussion the failure of the administration to achieve its goals to date has not been an accident. The determined opposition of civil rights organizations and their allies who represent Blacks, other minorities and disadvantaged Americans, and women has been a major factor in opposing effots to turn back the clock on civil rights progress.

Drugs

Primm, Cook and Drew (1981) in their study on the problems of drugs in the Black community, indicated that drug abuse in the Black community is the most serious and perplexing problem facing Black America. Any discussion of this problem must include tobacco and alcohol, for they are more detrimental to Black America than the abuse of those substances considered by most Blacks as the most common substances of abuse (heroin, cocaine, marijuana, PCP, and sedative hypnotic drugs). The writers also pointed out that

alcohol use and abuse is so common in the Black community that it has become accepted behavior. Its availability in large urban areas is such that there is no great distance to walk to procure it.

The writers later linked alcohol as a drug related problem of the Black community to the slave-master giving alcohol to slaves on the weekends and holidays to prevent uprisings. It was given to slaves to be consumed in a fashion that mimicked white consumption.

Curry (1986) reported in an article in the *Final Call*: "A hard habit to 'Crack' Cocaine-based drugs leaves human bodies twisted in streets of the U.S." He described "Crack" as the worst drug to ever be unleashed on people. It is gnashing its way through Harlem, the Bronx, suburbs and the estates. It has spilled like the white plague to affect all communities and all people. He later wrote that one observer said:

> Heroin came and didn't work, Angel Dust and that didn't work. But the Crack is turning Harlem out, it's the dragon blowing flame and its burning Niggers up. When dope was king, there were always people who sniffed on weekends and took care of business during the week. With this Crack, ALL THE PINS FALL.

The report results indicated that the Crack epidemic continues to ravage New York, leaving twisted, dehydrated human frames in its wake, city and federal officials wage war and point fingers under the pressure of mounting concern.

AIDS

According to Primm (1987) in a special report on AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), that infection with the human immuno deficiency virus (HIV) is one of the most serious problems facing members of any society. This problem is of particularly grave importance to the Black community, for its members are disproportionately repre-

sented among those who have been found to be HIV–antibody positive (meaning they have been exposed to and are infected by the virus, and they are infectious to others with whom they have sexual contact or share needles). They may not have any symptoms for years, if ever, but they remain carriers for the rest of their lives. He further reported the following results relative to AIDS:

1) More Black adults with AIDS (62 percent) than white adults with AIDS (33 percent).
2) The mode of transmission differs among races. Homosexual or bisexual men who had AIDS and patients who acquired AIDS from blood or blood products were predominantly white. Patients with a history of intravenous drug abuse or heterosexual contact with persons of risk for acquiring AIDS and patients with no identified mode of transmission were predominantly Black or Hispanic.
3) The proportion of Blacks with AIDS was high in all transmission categories, with the exception of hemophilia.
4) That AIDS poses a definite challenge to the physical and psycho-emotional health of Black women nationwide.
5) That of the total U.S. pediatric AIDS cases, 82 percent, or 204 of the 250 babies, are born to Black women.

In view of the above findings both men and women should ask about a partner's past health and sexual experiences, while at the same time reassessing their own sexual habits and practices for personal and community health precautions.

Summary

This paper has sought to bring into focus some of the widely held ideas concerning a

number of problems in the Black Urban Ghettos. However, if the information presented makes one uncomfortable, perhaps it will also serve as a motivator for Blacks to seek new and creative solutions for problems in Black America. Yet, as the end of the twentieth century is approaching, Black America must forge a national commitment to equality, justice, and goals that were once landmarks of the country's national policies. Furthermore, by becoming involved in a national commitment of this nature would serve to remove the smoke screens, which help too many people pretend that real problems do not exist in Black America.

Recommendations And Activities

With regard to the many problems reviewed in this paper concerning problems in Black urban ghettos and the Black community in general, the writer makes the following recommendations according to *The state of black America 1987*, which focused on programs that are necessary and achievable. The book listed ten activities and programs pertinent to Black America:

1) Racism – Racism in any of its insidious forms, exacts a toll on those who practice it, those who tolerate it, and those who suffer from it.
2) Civil Rights – The Justice Department's failure to enforce the spirit as well as the letter of civil rights law collaborates in the perpetuation of injustices against Blacks and other minorities.
3) Affirmative Action – Affirmative action policies and practices on the part of the government and the private sector are still needed as a remedy for past and present racial discrimination.
4) Full Employment – Joblessness has a devastating impact on unemployed people, in lowered self-esteem, higher levels of illness, mental strains, and

family problems. Full employment is vital because it produces crucially important humans and social benefits.

5) Social Welfare Reform – Social welfare reform must insure a comprehensive, adequate, equitable, publicly acceptable, universal and dignified system of benefits. The welfare system should ideally be linked to both adult employment and youth training opportunities which provide a living wage. Reform of the welfare system should provide an income floor below which no child should fall.

6) Education – Almost 63 percent of Black students attend predominantly minority schools. In an economy that is restructuring to emphasize highly skilled jobs and technical know how, students must have access to the appropriate use of an educational technology.

7) Health – The nation's Black community suffers from an unequal standard of health care due to a complexity of social problems: lack of financial support, resources, inadequate education, little job training or job opportunities.

8) Housing – A lack of affordable housing is the crux of the nation's housing crisis. Congress should be committed to developing and funding a national affordable housing program with primary emphasis on meeting the housing needs of low-income families.

9) Legislation And Advocacy – Attacks on "big government" too often focus on the problems experienced in the implementation of programs without enough attention and creativity devoted to solving the problems that government programs were developed to address (i.e., federal, and state social and economic development as well as urban revitalization).

10) The Responsibility of Black America – While government has an obliga-

tion to care for all of its citizens, Black America should become active participants and leaders in the struggle for equality to make a world of difference for the Black community as well as the whole of American society.

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